MARTÍ DE RIQUER

MARTÍ DE RIQUER HAS BEEN INVESTED DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA BY THE UNIVERSITY OF LA SAPIENZA, IN ROME, FURTHER RECOGNITION OF HIS WORK AS A ROMANIST. HE HAS DEVOTED HIS LIFE TO CATALAN AND SPANISH LITERATURE, AND STANDS OUT FOR HIS BOOK *LOS TROBADORES* AND HIS EDITIONS OF JOANOT MARTORELL'S *TIRANT LO BLANC*.

ASSUMPCIÓ MARESMA JOURNALIST

It's said of Martí de Riquer that as a teacher he has the gift of suggestion and as a student he has the gift of intuition. He personally would prefer to leave gifts out of it; they're not of much interest to him. A member of the British Academy, the Mediaeval Academy of America, the Real Academia Española, the Reial Acadèmia de les Bones Lletres –of which he's president– the Institut de France, amongst others, Martí de Riquer has just been invested Doctor Honoris Causa by the La Sapienza University of Rome, further international recognition of his work as a Romanist.

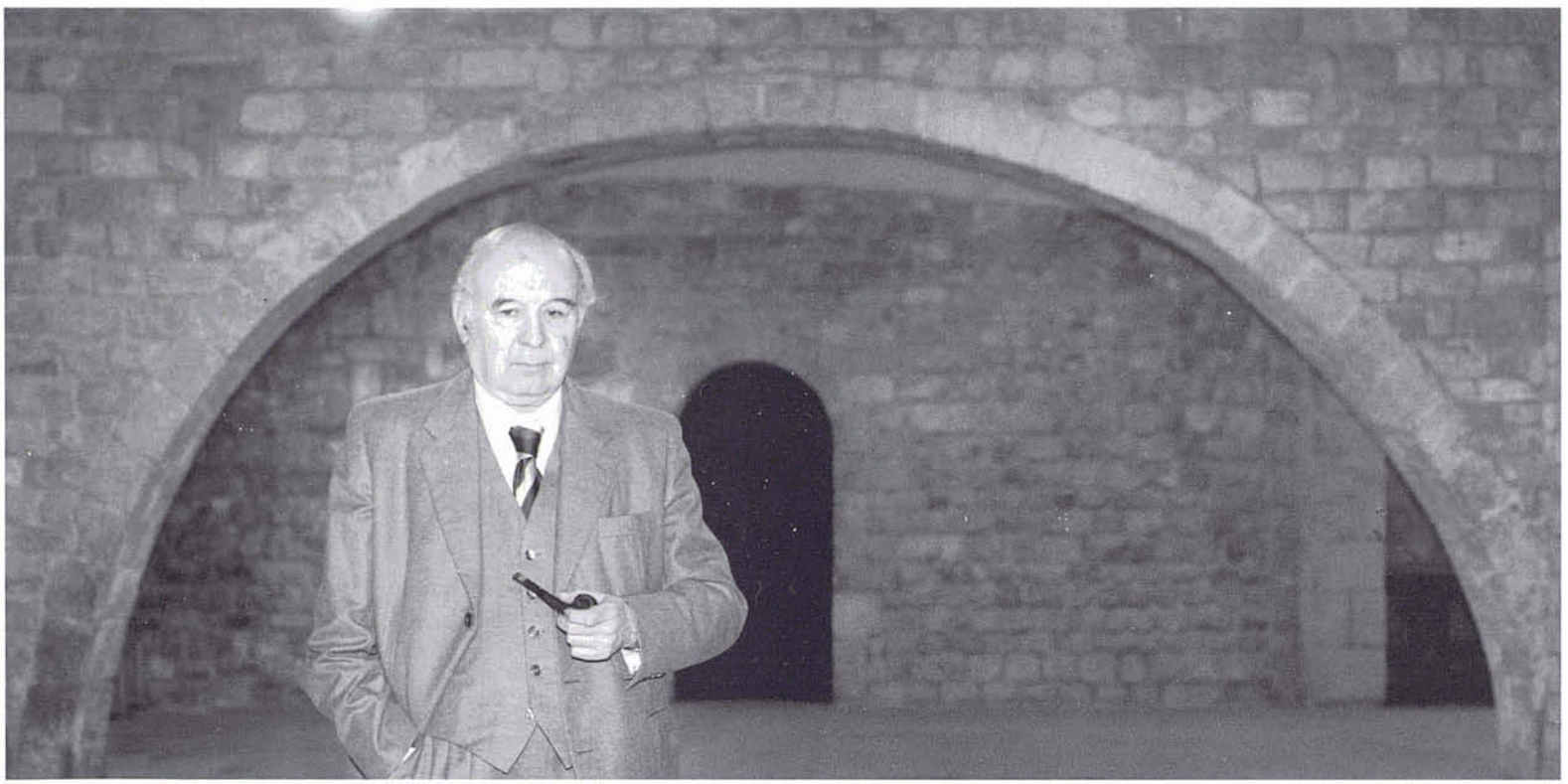
Marti de Riquer smokes a pipe. He explains the reason for this habit with as much decision and precision as he does the most learned questions. His pipe allows him to control the smoke, which would otherwise get under his glasses, as happens to people who usually smoke cigarettes. His speech is precise and straightforward. He's not given to excesses –in spite of his vitalism– just a touch of irony that acts as a thermometer by which to gauge his interlocutor, a caustic touch, with perfect intonation, doubtless a result of his forty-five years teaching at the university.

He published his first book at the age of twenty, *L'humanisme català*. Now, at the age of 76, it would take a specialist to prepare his bibliography. As a Romanist, he's devoted his life to Catalan and Spanish literature, but he's also worked in some depth on French and Provençal literature. Amongst his most important works are the three volumes of his monumental and definitive *Los Trobadores,* his exemplary editions of Joanot Martorell's *Tirant lo Blanc* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote,* and his many editions of Catalan classics like Jordi de Sant Jordi, Bernat Metge, Ramon Llull, Pere Torroella, Antoni Canals and Andreu Febrer. He is also recognised for his work on heraldry and weapons, auxiliary sciences to which he has devoted himself in depth. Perhaps his most original work is the book *Quinze generacions d'una família catalana,* which tells the story of his family over five centuries, a family which, contrary to normal practice, kept all sorts of private and public documents.

During his lifetime, Martí de Riquer has received much well deserved and honestly earned recognition.

–What has it meant to you to be invested Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of La Sapienza, in Rome?

–The fact that the University of Rome, La Sapienza, should have made me Doctor Honoris Causa is very satisfying to me as a Romance student. You see, I've devoted my life to the study of the Romance literatures, in other words, to the



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EL TINELL, REAL ACADÈMIA DE LES BONES LLETRES

daughters of Rome. In some ways, Rome is my capital.

–As a Romanist, do you think one should devote oneself to more than one language?

–You don't have to. There are excellent, first class students of French, Italian, Hispanics, Catalan, or Portuguese who concentrate entirely on one language and one literature; but there's another type of Romance student that has a more generalised projection. I don't defend one or the other, both of them are perfectly legitimate. For example, Menéndez y Pelayo, who is one of the most important figures in the world, only studied Spanish literature; Francesco de Sanctis, who's the best Italian critic, only studied Italian literature; like in France, Joseph Bédier, who only studied French. There are others who have worked on a more generalised projection, for example, the case of Karl Vossler or Benedetto Croce, who've had an overall view of the Romance literatures. It's enriching studying one to understand the other. The experience, both of critics and of the method applied to a given literature, can give new horizons and new perspectives when applied to another.

–But do you have any preferences?

–I have preferences according to the moment at which I devote myself to a subject. I go through phases. There are two literatures I've never abandoned: Catalan literature and Castilian literature. On the other hand, there are others, like Provençal or Medieval French, which I've studied at a particular time. I haven't abandoned them, but I've concentrated on other things and then gone back to them.

–But you've spent a lot of time studying Provençal literature.

–At times. There comes a point when, without becoming obsessed, one does get carried away by something. Also, you have to remember that bibliography is very complicated and very complex, and when you're working on a particular subject, you're handling a bibliography which is of use to you at that moment and that makes you devote even more time to it.

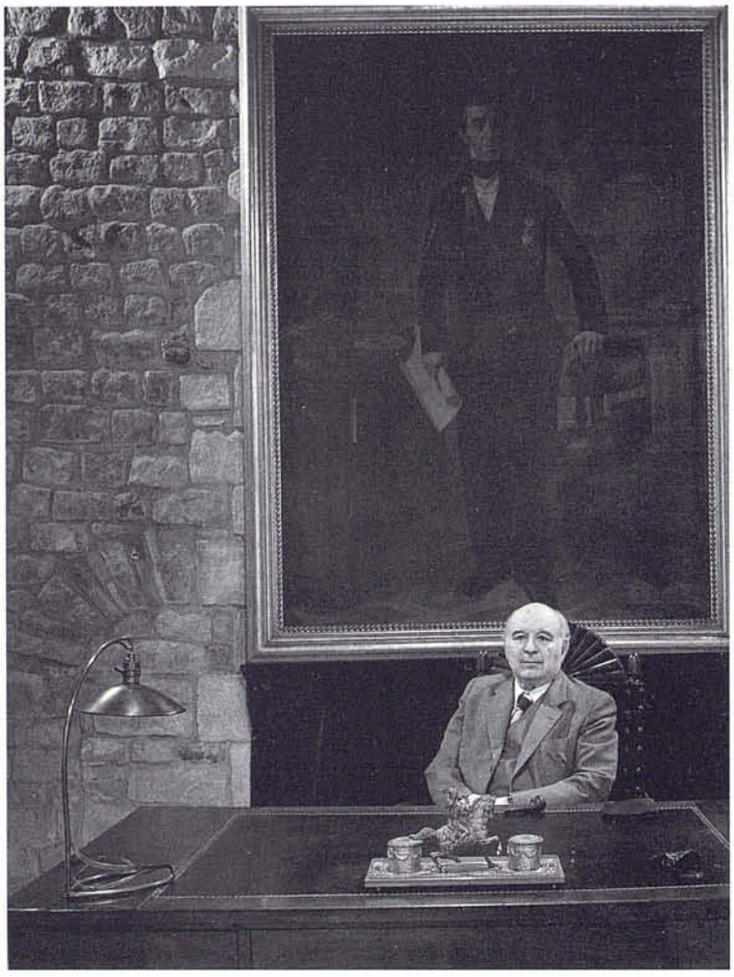
–From your knowledge of the Provençal troubadours, what are the main conclusions you've reached?

–What people forget most; people tend to think that the troubadours just composed love songs. Yes, there are plenty who did, but people forget that alongside the love song there's the sirvente. The sirvente is a satirical song, political and moralist, especially political. The great troubadours open up new horizons. We see that a troubadour belonging to a nobleman's court wrote poetry against this noble's enemy, and

the other nobleman would have a troubadour to answer him.
What today we call the media wasn't unknown in the Middle Ages. There were two types: there was what we might call the in-depth article, which responded to a particular policy, and was a troubadour's sirvente; and there was the news report, which was a song of heroic deeds.

–You provided an overall view of the troubadours; before your anthology, there had only really been partial studies.
–What may be true is that my three-volume work on the troubadours is still the most extensive publication directed at universities.
–How would you explain Catalonia to a foreigner through literature?
–Some people might accuse me of being tendentious, but there's a basic fact that people tend to forget. If that's so, I accept the accusation. A country is serious when it's culture is serious. A country which had a parliament in the Middle Ages in which this language was spoken, a country like Catalonia which in the Middle Ages translated Aristotle, translated Cicero, produced treatises on ophthalmology, is a serious country. Because a country that only produces poems, stories, and popular tales is at a lower level. In other words, what vouches for the dignity of a language, shall we say the universal dignity of a language, is that it can translate from Greek and Latin and that it can be used to write a technical work. Producing a good book of fiction or of poetry isn't the same. But a lot of people would disagree with that.
–Would you explain the country through its history rather than its literature?
–Through its cultural history, its most cultured literature. There are lots of countries that haven't got a history. For example, we're a country with a Museum where there's a room devoted to Huguet, a medieval painter. In a lot of countries the museums have to be ethnographic and this is very significant.
–But what are the key points of our literature?
–That it's a very cultured literature indeed. So cultured that the first important prose writer is Ramon Llull. In other words, the first prose writer in the Catalan language was a man who wrote with a correctness which has not yet been beaten, because he had a very wide vocabulary, because he had to talk about everything. Sometimes he had problems, because he needed a word and it didn't exist in Latin or in Arabic, and he had to invent it, and he invented it. And then his mind was organised like a philosopher's and his thinking was logical. He knew what was a subject and what was attributive, so his syntax was never wrong.

–What's the relation between literature and reality?
–There are two Catalan novels that are outstanding in this respect: Curial e Güelfa *and* Tirant lo Blanc, *because they reflect characters and events that were real. There were errant knights, Joanot Martorell himself went to England as an errant knight and there were knights that had been to Constantinople to defend the Turks. At the end of the 14th century and all through the 15th there was a revival of chivalry, but be careful, because there was a sort of osmosis. These people imitated the novels, the unrealistic novels, and wanted to live the life of these novels, but at the same time they were the model for the novels written by the authors of "Tirant" and "Curial". But this shouldn't surprise us; do we imitate the cinema or does the cinema imitate us? We'll never know. What happens is that in the end everything is the same. We imitate the cinema and the cinema imitates us. It's the same process.*
–Which fascinates you most: history or literature?
–I'm a professor of literature. History helps a lot; without history, you can't understand literature, and I'm speaking of ancient literature, though the same holds good for modern literature. Obviously, someone who doesn't know much about France at the end of the 19th century won't understand Marcel Proust.
–It's now five hundred years since the publication of the first edition of *Tirant lo Blanc,* in Valencia. What does this work represent in a European context?
–At a time when novels were about knights and were set in the remote past, in exotic countries with fabulous elements like dragons, giants and enchanted palaces, Martorell produced a novel featuring a knight, but on a human scale, and set in contemporary time, in countries that were known –England, Sicily, the Byzantine Empire– it has no exoticism, the hero isn't a supernatural being, but a man who is very strong and very brave. For example, Tirant never fights more than two knights at once, as opposed to the knights in other novels, who took on twenty or thirty and always won. There's one point where Martorell says that if Tirant won his battles it was because he knew how to hold his breath, and that's how he maintained his strength. In other words, a physiological explanation for a knight. And then there's something that's essential, and that is that history is sometimes more wonderful than fiction. Roger de Flor, leader of the Greek Empire, and married to one of the Emperor's nieces, was assassinated in Adrianopolis. Tirant, Head of the Empire, and married to the Emperor's daughter, taking a walk through Adrianopolis as well, catches cold, catches pneumonia, and dies in bed. It's far more natural to die in bed than to be murdered by Persians. The novel is more natural than what really happened. When Tirant lo Blanc sees he's going to die, he makes a will, and Cervantes, who had great judgement, said, "here the knights sleep and die in their beds and make a will before dying". That is, he found it unusual. And remember that Don Quixote dies in his bed and makes a will before dying.
–And are there also differences in the treatment of love?
–We mustn't forget that in those long, pedantic speeches, Carmesina is four-



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teen years old. The girls of today could learn something from her.

–But is the treatment more daring?

–No. The thing is, it's treated joyfully. The love between Tirant and Carmesina... people say there's obscenity but then there is in Amadís and other novels as well; people give enormous importance to this idea, and it's not right. The thing is that their love is fun, it's young, it's a happy courtship.

–One merit which a pupil of yours pointed out is that of having drawn the line between the "books of chivalry" and the "chivalric novel".

–That's what I meant earlier. For example, Amadís de Gaula *is a wonderful novel, I love it, but it isn't realistic. It takes place shortly after the death of Jesus Christ, in a country called Gaula, which no-one's ever heard of. That's a "book of chivalry". It's the exact opposite to* Tirant lo Blanc.

–Students of yours have said that you have a great capacity for intuition. Is that one of the tools you use?

–That I don't know.

–But you have used it?

–I don't quite know what intuition is. What does it mean? Saying things without having studied them? Maybe I have sometimes spoken without thinking, but that's not the same.

–Shall we just say that you've got a nose for literature?

–Well, when you're dealing with particular literary problems, especially to do with the Middle Ages, it's a good idea to read Agatha Christie. Sometimes you have to follow a course of reasoning to find the right answer, so you have to set aside anything that might put you off the track, and go for those things that provide proof. I've used this method with success more than once.

–For example?

–In showing that Guillem de Cervera and Cerverí de Girona were the same writer, something which has been proved. In an initial article I came to this conclusion by what you said, by intuition. In a later article, a series of documents had come out of the Archives of the Crown of Aragon and one of them said, "Guillem de Cervera is Cerverí de Girona". It was a document from the year one thousand, two hundred and eighty-something. In other words, this confirmed a study carried out with objective data. That's one case. I only

hope the same happens with my work on the Quixote of Avellaneda, that a document turns up saying that Mister Pasamonte was Avellaneda.

–Is that what you claim?

I've arrived at a conclusion which is a fact, and which I clearly distinguish from the hypothesis. The fact is that Cervantes, in the first part of Don Quixote, *in the episode about the Galeots, satirizes and humiliates Jeronimo de Pasamonte, his companion in the first regiment at Lepanto. This is a fact. Ginés de Paramonte is Jeronimo de Pasamonte. In the novel, Cervantes says he wrote an autobiography, and Jeronimo de Pasamonte did write his autobiography. Now, that Jeronimo de Pasamonte should then have got his revenge by writing the second part of* Don Quixote, *with a prologue in which he insults Cervantes and says he offended him in the first part, that's a hypothesis. But he does say quite clearly that Cervantes offended him in the first part. Therefore, the author of Avellaneda's* Don Quixote *must be someone who Cervantes offended in the first part, and Jeronimo was offended. There are no documents to prove it, and they're unlikely to turn up.*

–Is that the case with the house Cervantes lived in in Barcelona?

–No. That's not a hypothesis. I think it's been quite clearly demonstrated that Cervantes was in Barcelona in 1610, because all the references he makes to Catalonia date from this period. He speaks of Perot Rocaguinarda, who reached the height of his fame as a bandit in 1609. He speaks of the Four Galleys of Catalonia, which were created in 1609, he speaks of the expulsion of the Moriscos, which took place at a later period. So everything is later than the first part of Don Quixote. *Cervantes came to Barcelona on Saint George's day.*

In the summer of 1610, the Count of Lemos was in Barcelona, on his way to Naples to be made Vice-roy. The Count of Lemos had a group of intellectuals with him, chosen by Leonardo de Argensola, who picked people of his liking, from his family, and who wouldn't overshadow him; the proof is that he wouldn't accept Gongora or Cervantes, who wanted to go. Cervantes came to Barcelona in a final attempt to have the Count of Lemos take him to Naples. Don Quixote *was beaten on the beach at Barcelona. And it's quite clear: at the Montjuïc end of Barcelona beach, there were rocks; the beach started where Barceloneta starts today. Just beyond the Pla del Palau was the Portal del Mar, and where the Nautical Training College is now, that was the beach, and that's where* Don Quixote *was beaten. Well, bearing in mind that the buildings were lower, this beach could be seen perfectly well from No. 2, Passeig de Colom, where tradition says that Cervantes lived. Therefore, the tradition might not be wrong.*

–Why has there been so much controversy over whether or not Cervantes came to Barcelona?

–Because everything to do with Cervantes is controversial. Everything, from the six false birth certificates in existence to the forged works. The magnificent epistle to Mateo Vàzquez, which is wonderful, is a 19th century forgery. In other words, Cervantes is surrounded by doubts. The same thing happens with Shakespeare: a lot of doubts exist about his identity and things like that.

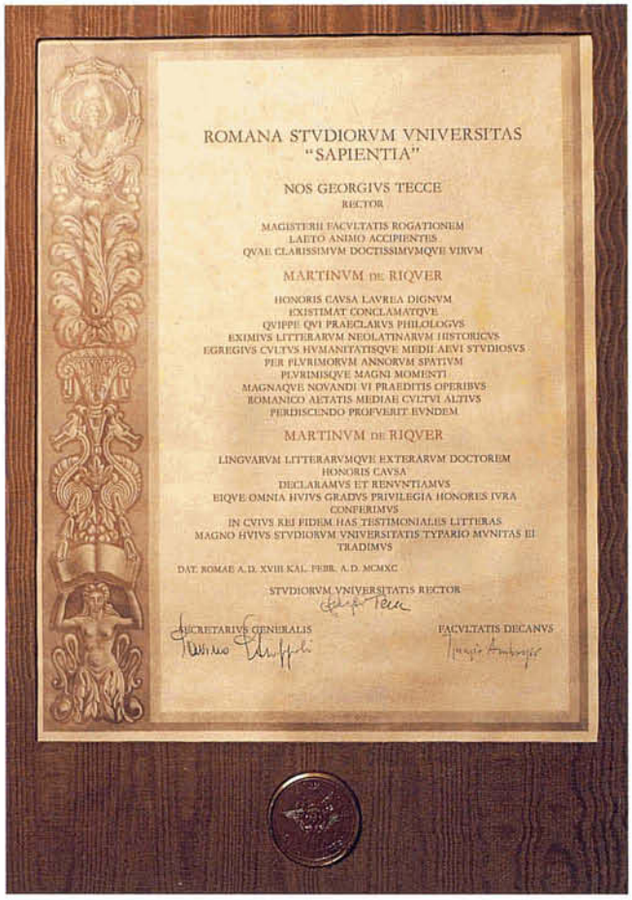
–Your editions are considered exemplary, especially your edition of *Tirant lo Blanc,* as regards both the respect for the work and its modernization. What makes a good edition of a classic?

–Basically, there are two approaches to publishing classics. The first involves faithful reproduction, even of the spelling in the manuscripts or first editions of a work. For example, the texts published today by the collection "Els nostres clàssics".

In certain works of great importance, the aim is to reach a broad public which demands to be allowed to read them. These editions, which have to be produced with as much respect as the others, update the spelling and avoid what we could call the scholarly apparatus. My editions of Tirant lo Blanc *and* Don Quixote *come under the second category; my editions of the works of Bernat Metge come under the first.*

–You've also studied heraldry and weapons.

–These are complementary. In fact, these are things I studied as a result of



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HONORIS CAVSA LAVREA DIGNVM
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my work on Tirant lo Blanc, *where there were some problems to do with weapons that I couldn't clear up. Then I published some letters of war between knights, where there was a lot spoken about weapons and I made an index. I saw it was something that had to be studied seriously, and that's what I did. Then I published a book on Catalan arms and armour and this led me to the study of Catalan heraldry, which clears up a few points, such as the identification of books and their owners. These are auxiliary subjects to Medieval history.*

–Have you always combined your studies with teaching?

–Yes. I've spent forty-five years teaching at the university.

–Do you like teaching?

–I enjoy it a lot. This morning I gave a class... although I'm retired I still take a doctoral course. When you introduce a lesson, you always make a note because something you've explained is worth using later. Doctoral courses are very useful when you're working on something; it's a good idea to make the subject of your book a doctoral course. It's like a rehearsal, like pruning; you see how well people understand it, and whether or not you've explained things well and understood them fully yourself. It's very different from what people say about the university being teaching and being investigation. This is clear amongst the chemists, the physicists, but for us it's very different.

–Is the university in decline?

–All my life I've heard people say that the universities are worse than ever, so I don't know what's going to happen.

–Do you disagree?

–There are wonderful people and there are students who aren't so wonderful. This has always happened and always will.

–Is it not worth worrying about?

–The students will be sifted by life in the end.

–Have you created a school?

–I wouldn't call it a school. Those who have studied with me and form a group, we call the tribe. Calling it a tribe is much nicer. A school is more pedantic.

–Are you leaving a tribe ready?

–Yes. I'm very lucky in that within the tribe there are a lot of people who are very knowledgeable. They write books which make me extraordinarily envious and which I would like to have written myself. And that's fine. It makes me very happy when I see that one of the tribe has written a book I would like to have written myself. And that happens very often. ■